

# Frankfort/Kentucky

## State eyes college textbook costs

Proposed study asks if \$400 to \$600 on books is too high

MURRAY, Ky. (AP) — After hearing professors tell students that caring about their majors means paying for the necessary books, Cassidy Norvell shelled out \$400 for the texts.

"It's not that I'm unwilling, I just resent it a little bit," said Norvell, a senior at Murray State University.

Norvell isn't alone in that resentment, with students and parents complaining about the high costs of textbooks. Their complaints are getting some attention in the Kentucky General Assembly.

State Rep. Rick Nelson, D-Middlesboro, and Sen. Ken Winters, R-Murray, are considering a resolution to study the factors leading to increasing textbook prices.

Nelson said complaints from constituents and his daughter's college book bills of more than \$500 prompted his push for House Concurrent Resolution 9. He said the study, which would be completed by December if approved, would examine why textbook companies produce so many new editions every year and why resale prices are so low.

"Textbook costs are about 25 percent of tuition to public four-year colleges," Nelson said. "That's a significant amount of money that parents may not consider when planning for college costs."

Winters, chairman of the Senate education committee, said he doesn't know what the committee's approach to the resolution will be. He said he will talk to educators about the driving forces in the college and secondary book market.

Murray State University senior Emily Just of Louisville will take any help she can get. Just estimates she and her sister, Murray State freshman Rachel Just, spent a total of almost \$600 last semester on books.

"That was not a fun phone call to Mom," Emily Just said.

Emily Just said she spends between \$300 and \$500 per semester on textbooks, a cost that has increased as she advanced in her Spanish and premed biology majors. Spanish books can cost up to \$100 for a multi-semester course. Her science books can cost \$80 to \$100, along with a \$50 to \$70 lab

manual.

"One semester I took several classes with labs, so you had to buy the book, the lab manual and then little extras like dissection kits. It all really adds up," she said. "If you're a student putting yourself through school, \$600 is a lot of money. It's not just something you can pay off by cutting stuff out of your budget."

The U.S. Government Accountability Office said in a recent report that textbook prices have risen at twice the rate of annual inflation over the past two decades, an annual average of 6 percent since the 1987-1988 school year.

Bookstores get a discount off the list price of books, usually about 20 percent, but must also cover operating costs within that percentage, said Jack Vaughn, director of Murray State University's bookstore.

If a book costs \$10, the bookstore buys it for \$8 and the \$2 profit pays for expenses such as shipping, utilities and maintenance.

"We pay all of the costs a business has to pay," Vaughn said. "We're self-

supporting."

Books in the campus store range from \$1 to \$160. Vaughn uses five used book companies to purchase as many copies of the required titles as possible. Vaughn said that practice saves students up to 25 percent.

West Kentucky Community and Technical College dean of business Susan Graves said the campus bookstore purchases books on a contract basis through Barnes and Noble Booksellers.

The move, made by the Kentucky Community and Technical College System in 2004, gives students access to cheaper used books that previously couldn't be ordered through the campus store, Graves said.

Emily Just gets used books whenever possible, but said that is a double-edged sword.

"Buying the book is cheaper, but a new edition may come out in the middle of the year, meaning you won't be able to sell the book back," she said.